

Faithful Witnesses: Praying With the Persecuted

Christians worldwide are paying a heavy price for following Christ.

North Korea tops the country list each year as the worst persecutor of Christians. If discovered, North Korea believers are arrested, tortured, and killed for their faith.

Thirty-three-year-old Kim Eun Jin is among the few **Christians** who have escaped the country to tell about their experience.

"We met every Saturday evening. My family gathered in the back room of our small apartment. We had to be very quiet," Jin recalled.

"We whispered when we prayed, sang songs or read the Bible. We often covered our heads to muffle the noise," he said.

But soon the authorities discovered that her father was a secret believer.

"My father was a tailor in town and the police suspected something was going on. We believe they planted listening devices in his shop and on his clothes," Jin said.

In 1994 police raided the family's secret **house church**. They arrested Kim's father and her uncle. Both men probably ended up in one of the six labor camps dotting North Korea.

Eric Foley, CEO of Seoul USA, a mission group helping North Korean Christians, said if believers are released from prison they face additional hardships.

"That becomes the hardest time in their Christian life because they are back in the grind of life and not only that, they are tracked, they are traced, their relatives are watched, their

phone calls are monitored,” Foley said.

Pakistan Persecution

Meanwhile, far from North Korea in the Islamic world of **Pakistan**, Christians are denied the right to free speech. They even face imprisonment or possible death if they say something deemed offensive about Muhammad or **Islam**.

“The whole Christian community can pray for Pakistan and if you want to step forward and do something concrete, you can uplift the Christian community here in Pakistan,” Jave Rauf, a Pakistani Christian, said.

Many Christians during the past three decades have been falsely accused and imprisoned on charges of blasphemy.

Pakistan’s blasphemy law contains three main sections: blasphemy against Islam, blasphemy against the Muslim Holy book—the Quran, and blasphemy against the prophet Muhammad.

The maximum sentence for those found guilty of blaspheming the Quran is life imprisonment.

The maximum penalty for those convicted of violating blasphemy against the prophet Muhammad is death.

No Christian has actually been executed for blaspheming Muhammad, but many like a woman named **Asia Bibi** have wasted away for years in prison, waiting for their cases to reach a higher court.

That’s when they are usually thrown out for lack of evidence.

Bibi is a Christian mother who has been imprisoned now for more than four years. She’s confined to a small 8-by-10 prison cell near the Pakistan city of Faisalabad where she awaits possible death.

Bibi was arrested in June 2009 after an argument with her Muslim co-workers who accused her of insulting the prophet

Mohammed. A local judge found Bibi guilty and sentenced her to death by hanging. Her case is still on appeal.

Those who speak out against the blasphemy pay a heavy price. Shahbaz Bhati was a Christian and an official in the Pakistan government.

He called for Bibi's release and the repeal of Pakistan's **blasphemy laws**.

"I believe in **Jesus Christ** who has given His own life for us. I know what is the meaning of the cross and I'm following the cross and I am ready to die for a cause," Bhatti said.

Bhati was eventually killed for his efforts. As he drove to work, radicals shot him to death in his car.

Across Africa

There is also a tide of **Islamic extremism** spreading across Africa. Somalia is one of the most deadly places for Christians.

The al-Shabab terror group wants to impose **Shariah law** on the Somali people. Its goal is to rid the country of all Christians. Muslim converts to Christianity are killed.

In September 2008, an al-Shahab video swept the Internet, showing the brutal beheading of 25-year-old aid worker Mansour Mohammed. He had converted to Christianity in 2005.

One Muslim convert to **Christianity** said he was awakened in his home by al-Shabab soldiers.

"They ransacked my house, searched my bag and found several pages from a Bible. They had crosses on them," Abdi said—his name has been changed to protect his identity.

Abdi was taken away, imprisoned, and tortured.

"I was blindfolded and they put me in a dark, underground

cell. They beat me up with a wooden baton,” he recalled.

“They wanted to know where I got the Bible pages and if I knew of any others like me. ... When they finally took the blindfold off, I noticed three dead bodies in the room. They placed them there just to frighten me,” Abdi continued.

His torturers said they were going to kill him, but late one night Abdi and two cellmates made a daring escape.

Reunited with his family, Abdi is now living in a safe place. He said he still suffers physical pain from the torture he endured, but spiritually he feels closer to God

“I was happy to go through all this because now I am stronger spiritually. People prayed for me to escape. Their **prayers** are what saved my life,” he said.

So how should Christians worldwide pray during the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church?

“We shouldn’t pray for the **persecuted church**, but we should pray with the persecuted church. ... They don’t pray to be released from **persecution**. They pray to be found faithful in it.” Foley said.